Last Updated: Thursday, 12 August, 2004, 00:03 GMT 01:03 UK

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Monkeys test 'hardworking gene'

By Richard Black
BBC science correspondent

Scientists in the United States have found a way of turning lazy monkeys into workaholics using gene therapy.

The monkeys were back to normal after 10 weeks of treatment

Usually monkeys work hard only when they know a reward is coming, but the animals given this treatment did their best all the time.

Monkeys are rather like people in their approach to work - at least, those who live in a laboratory and learn to press levers for rewards of food and water.

They concentrate on their task only when the moment of delivery approaches.

Researchers at the National Institute of Mental Health near Washington DC, led by Dr Barry Richmond, have now developed a genetic treatment which changes their work ethic markedly.

> **"Monkeys under the influence of the treatment don't procrastinate"**
>
> Dr Barry Richmond
> US National Institute of Mental Health

"Normal monkeys and people procrastinate - tend not to work very well when they have a lot of time to get the job done, and work better when the reward is nearer in time," Dr Richmond says.

"The monkeys under the influence of the treatment don't procrastinate."

The treatment consists of blocking an important brain chemical - dopamine.

After about 10 weeks it had worn off, and the monkeys were back to their usual unmotivated selves.

Dr Richmond believes treatments based on this concept could one day benefit people with conditions like depression, where motivation has largely disappeared from their lives.

But for the rest of us, the day when such treatments fall into the hands of our bosses may be one we would prefer to put off.